

4/23/68

Memo

To: G Derbyshire

From: J Lederberg

Imshenetski visit

Imshenetski, Director, Institute of Microbiology, Acad of Sci, USSR visited the SFO Bay area around April 23, 1960. On that date, accompanied by Drs. R Y Stanier and M Doudoroff of the Dept Bacteriology, U of Calif., Berkeley, he was driven to Palo Alto en route to Pacific Grove to visit Dr C B Van Niel. (I had planned to join this party but was too preoccupied having just returned from London myself.) We spent about 4 hours together, including lunch before they went on. Imsh.'s English is fair; he was quite tired and on a number of occasions gave the impression of having missed the main point of a discussion but picked up a detail.

We made some attempt to discuss problems of 'space microbiology'. One unit in his laboratory is devoted to the study of radiation effects; he felt these could be much better simulated on the ground than ~~in~~ conducted in space craft, and the indicated dosages are relatively small. He indicated this as a main area of s.b. research, another being the capture of meteoritic dust, which however posed great difficulties at high impact velocities. He seemed a little surprised that we should be concerned immediately with methods for planetary landing studies, gave the impression it had not occurred to him to be thinking about this in any detail. His insight into basic problems seemed rather limited.

Note: his assistant director is Ierussalimski, who has written in Pravda on decontamination techniques.

He foresaw great difficulties in producing any microbiological apparatus, felt this had to be handled by skilled engineers, and indicated his institute had rather poor instrumentational facilities/

My overall impression, unless he was constrained to evade the question, is that actual developmental work for exobiological experiments is not being seriously pursued; however, this may be the province of other institutions. (Biophysics may be a more likely area insofar as this institute is concerned with Laika, and may be in closer touch with the space program generally.) We did not go into details of decontamination procedures -- possibly Ierussalimski would have to be approached more directly. Imshenetskii seemed only mildly interested in this area; he was pleased to see the miniature McArthur microscope and inquired where it had been obtained.

Imshenetskii's general posture as a microbiologist was not impressive; however, language may have been something of a barrier to sophisticated discussion.

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If Van Niel or Stanier have anything more concrete to add, will follow with same.